

Bear gets tangled in weeds at Windsor Pond, nearly drowns

By Karen Gardner

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WINDSOR-While Clarksburg resident Alan Bressett had long been concerned the weeds growing in Windsor Pond may prove dangerous to those swimming and waterskiing there, he never imagined he'd have to help rescue a bear from being entangled in them.

Monday evening, around 7:30, Bressett was tending to his lawn when he looked up to see a bear cub swimming about 30 feet out in the 50-acre pond near his Windsor summer cottage. Although he had seen traces of bears in the area, that was the first time he had seen a bear in the water during daylight hours.

"At first, I thought it was a dog paddling around in the water," said Bressett. "When I saw how big his ears were, I realized it was probably a one-year-old bear cub that weighed about 80 pounds."

Bressett then noticed the bear appeared to be having difficulty swimming, and he and a friend, Ray Adams, found the animal had become caught in the long-stemmed, Eurasian Milfoil weeds that have gradually been overtaking the pond.

"[The bear] was spinning around and taking in water and hacking and paddling like crazy, trying to get out," said Bressett.

But while he and Adams got into a nearby boat to go and help the bear, the animal cleared himself of the weeds and began to move toward the shore. Bressett and Adams assisted him in getting out of the water by nudging him with their paddles.

"But once he got to shore, he was in real bad straits, as if he had just gone into shock-maybe suffering from hypothermia," said Bressett.

Environmental police from Fish and Wildlife's western regional headquarters were called in, and an officer tranquilized the animal and moved him from the area. No other information was available from the agency by presstime.

Although Bressett is glad the bear didn't drown, he also is concerned the same situation could happen with a camper.

"If that could happen to a bear, it could also happen to a young swimmer," he said. "You can get caught up in that stuff, and if nobody's there" the situation could become deadly.

"We never had Milfoil in the lake, years ago," said Bressett. "People bring

their boats in from other lakes and don't clean their props and the underside of their boats, and it spreads.

"In the low-lying areas in the lake now, it's real heavy. The thing is, there's a lot of kids that waterski, tube, and stuff like that," he said, adding that some of the owners of the approximately 100 cottages around the pond have been trying to get someone from the state to recognize the potential danger.

Last year, Bill Greenwald of North Adams, who also owns a cottage at Windsor Pond, paid about \$500 for a biologist to conduct a study to see how much it would cost to chemically remove the weeds from the water.

The biologist confirmed the weeds were, indeed, Eurasian Milfoil, an invasive species which was brought to the pond and released accidentally. His report states although Windsor Pond's water is quite clean, it has a "fairly substantial infestation" of the weeds that would only get worse, until it totally surrounds the entire shore line.

"Since I've been there (five years) it's just exploded," said Greenwald. "You never used to see any of it breaking the surface, and last summer there were whole areas where it was reaching the surface.

Greenwald estimates it will cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000 for each application of Sonar, a commonly used chemical benign to people, to rid the pond of the weeds. He would like Sonar applied about every five years to control the weeds.

He said enough residents live there that if each contributes about \$100, the money may be raised. But, because there's no active association, that may be difficult. And, permission to treat the pond must first be granted by its owner. The problem is, since the water rights were last traced to the non-defunct Brown Paper Co. of Dalton, which owned them around 1900, no one seems to know if the state or the town of Windsor owns the pond.

"There really is some confusion on who owns the body of water itself," he said. No taxes are being paid on the property, but there is a process by which the town may allow for the procedure if no owner can be determined.

"I don't know if money is out there to try and clean this up before it gets to be like Cheshire Lake or it gets to be like Saratoga Lake in New York, where you can't put a boat in the water, it's so thick," said Bressett.

"Once a pond becomes inundated with this material ... it takes decades to get it back to the way it was before, because of the mat of dead material that it produces on the bottom," said Greenwald.